

MAN AS A NEIGHBOUR: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Tomáš Jablonský*

Abstract

This paper strives to seek an answer to the question - who is my neighbour, from the perspective of anthropology. We want to emphasise that the intellectual and cultural development of an individual person can only happen in collective cooperation with others.

Viktor E. Frankl, the founder of logotherapy, called the 20th Century, the century of meaninglessness. Man seeks only his happiness. Happiness, however, cannot be the goal of human life. Happiness is a part of our lives, but it is also part of our struggles, part of giving up many illusions. Happiness goes hand in hand with a search for a meaning in that situation, in which a mutual relationship is being built.

Currently, there is much talk about global issues that threaten man, especially in his physical existence. Less relevant are the ethical and behavioural problems, which threaten man in his spiritual existence. Many diverse cultures exist, thus also different ideas about the correct way of life. Becoming stronger, however, are also the voices, which emphasise the generally accepted principles.

As already mentioned, we want to point out that the intellectual and cultural development of an individual person can only happen in collective cooperation with others. Social pedagogy is such a platform of social services, in which takes place a tangible expression of love towards one's neighbour. As stated by Catherine of Siena, "... we lack different things, so we miss the various people, who mediate them to us... ". We are reliant upon each other.

* Doc. PaedDr. Tomáš Jablonský, PhD; Department of Pedagogy and Psychology, Faculty of Education, Catholic University in Ružomberok (Slovakia), e-mail: tomas.jablonsky@ku.sk

According to this diversity of who received what, also the giving and contributing to the common good will be diverse. We think that rightly a quality education, which is the second birth of man, may be one of the most important bearers of these changes.

One of the essential questions of today becomes the question of Immanuel Kant, of whether the human race moves forward for the better. A tendency to give up on moral values and norms is becoming stronger. We lose faith that it makes sense to adhere to these norms. The constantly increasing desire of man for power reduces his ability to determine the order of values. In this situation, it is extremely important to have fixed points or milestones, which determine the path. Their reliable knowledge is one of the prerequisites of a successful education.

Modern times place high expectations on each one of us, not only work expectations, but also emotional ones. Although the exact technique opens a world of unknown possibilities to man, as a consideration for this knowledge, it repeatedly offers a depletion of most natural manifestations, which stem from human relations full of thoughtfulness, empathy, attention and cordiality.

On the walls of one European city, someone wrote these words:

Your car is Japanese
your pizza, Italian
your democracy, Greek
your coffee, Brazilian
your vacations, Turkish
your numbers, Arabic
your letters, Latin
- only your neighbour is still a foreigner?

This text expresses that which is at the centre of today's debate on the topic - who is my neighbour?

Someone or other said that man today is a "happy Sisyphus", who pushes the boulder of his life up a steep hill, without knowing why he does so and still laughing while he does so... It is

a type of modern oblivion for the many problems, which are gradually growing for us and perhaps also, therefore, every day we try to forget or tear from our chest, Augustine's "cor inquietum". During this effort, however, quite the opposite usually occurs. A refusal to seek the truth about life and about the most important principles within it brings restless loneliness and fear. Stepping away from man and his problems.

Not by chance, is our time a time of fear. The fear of tomorrow, the fear of others (from the immigrants, from that which is different) and also from the fear of ourselves. All of these are expressions of concern about the truth. But that is what it is about in each of our lives.

According to Emmanuel Levinas (French philosopher of the 20th Century, who spent his childhood in Lithuania, later in Ukraine, and who after his arrival in France, studied at the University of Strasbourg, and from 1973 was a professor at the Sorbonne), we have forgotten the phenomenology of the human face, the face of our neighbour. The face, which is the first reality with which we encounter, when meeting with people.

According to him, the meeting with a human face is an ingrained ethical issue. In fact, when we see the nose, eyes, forehead, when we see them and we can describe them, that is when we turn to the other person, not only as a subject. In fact, the face of man is not first and foremost something that is intended solely for perception, which may be reduced only to perception. There is above all, a directness and openness of the face itself, its direct and defenceless exposure. The face is that which is for man the most naked, most exposed.

And yet precisely it is the face, which can stop another from a violent act. From war narratives, it is actually known how hard it is to kill someone, who looks into the person's face. According to Levinas, the face thus has its absolute meaning, namely **significance without context**. This note is very important.

Almost always, we are with people in some kind of "context", as professors, teachers, labourers, as children or parents, we act according to that which is contained in the passport, we dress up in that way, we present ourselves in that way. We have our significance in the context of life's tasks. Is that the most important thing? Levinas claims that it is not. All this may be the reason for the division of people into social classes, community and interest

groups. The human face has, on the contrary, a sense in itself. You are simply you. The human face is difficult to classify. It is something that cannot happen through intellectually graspable content. The face is unattainable; it leads us “behind”. While the look is always seeking adequacy, a relationship towards the face is always an ethical issue.

The ancient biblical question of who is my neighbour is actually a question of the recognition of the immediate, what makes us human. It is thanks to Levinas that the current generation of people, who live in the middle of their problems and dilemmas (anti globalisation fights, an anti-immigration tendency in the West, religious intolerance, anti-value tendencies, pathological problems in society...), recalling a sense of the questions in this very topical and lively form. Because the human face is a second person, who speaks to me, and to whom I am speaking. (Leščinský, 2012) A man with a face, in which gleams absolute and which constantly refers to us - do not hurt, help!

Precisely one of the aims of a Christian education is to help man - a neighbour, help in dealing with problems in life, focusing on the shaping of a positive pro-social value orientation.

Such education requires goodness, kindness and an ability to help, but also to forgive or to strive to get better. Only in that way can he make his own life better, more humane. Precisely, the "golden rule" - *"Whatever you want done to you, do to others, whatever you do not want done to you, do not do to others"* as the basic moral rule expresses universal human reciprocity, a moral equality and, at the same time, lays down a moral claim on man as a personality. (Lencz, 1992) Such a personality expresses empathy with people who have difficulties, looks forward to bestowing to someone or sharing with someone, effortlessly in favour of other people, has sympathy with the problems of loved ones, experiences with other people their worries and joys

A long and arduous journey leads to such a notion of context, a journey of a change to the mental schema and yet an established approach, in order for risks, which lead to a collective or individual egoism, not to become the starting point of further measures, which threaten the existence of human civilisation at its deepest roots.

A part of this process will also certainly be a growing of the problems. But problems are increasing precisely the closer man gets to his destination. And he, who has started, as Horace says, is already half way there.

In conclusion, allow me to briefly quote the Indian poet, Rabindranath Tagore, in the West known under the name, Thākura (b. in Calcutta, 1859 to 1941):

“I dreamt that life is joyful.

I woke up: it was the service...

I served, therefore, and in the service I found joy...”

This is an intrinsic apostolate, supremely current and needed in our time. Because help, service for another, or giving, comes from the heart and not from wealth.

References

- Jablonský, T.: *Kooperatívne učenie vo výchove (Cooperative teaching in education)*. Levoča: MTM, 2006. ISBN 80-89187-13-7
- Jablonský, T.: Rozvíjanie prosociálnosti a kooperácie u detí ako predpoklad budovania pozitívnych medziľudských vzťahov (The development of prosociality and cooperation among children, as a prerequisite for building positive interpersonal relationships). In: *Mládež a hodnoty (Youth and values) 2007*. Olomouc: Cyril and Methodius Theological Faculty, Palacký University, 2008, p. 73-79. ISBN 978-80-244-2142-1
- Leščinský, J.: *Perlový náhrdelník (Pearl necklace)*. Ružomberok: Verbum, 2012. ISBN 978-80-8084-907-8
- Lencz, L.: *Od konfrontácie k dialógu (From confrontation to dialogue)*. Bratislava: Nové mesto, 1992. ISBN 80-85487-08-X
- Siváková, G. - Jablonský, T.: Shaping the discipline of children as a prerequisite for the development of their personal (moral, emotional, social) disposition. In: *Wybrane aspekty wychowania w rodzinie*. Stalowa Wola: Catholic University of Lublin, 2010, p. 59-91. ISBN 978-83-86916-77-X